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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9542

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHZJ/HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 9855

RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9543

S E C R E T RIYADH 001691

NOFORN

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/11/2018

TAGS: ELAB KIRF KISL KTIP PHUM SA SMIG SOCI XF

SUBJECT: TAIF CHRISTIAN "DEPORTATION" ISSUE RESOLVED

REF: A. JEDDAH 00448

1B. RIYADH 01620

Classified By: Classified by Polcouns Lisa Carle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) DEPORTATIONS RESCINDED: On November 9 and 10, two contacts confirmed to Poloff that the Makkah Governorate's orders to deport 13 Taif Christians (Ref A) have been rescinded. Reji Johnson (strictly protect) asserted that the situation had been definitely resolved thanks to a higher order, presumably from the Ministry of Interior, which directed the Makkah Governorate not/not to deport the Taif Christians. Johnson stated that the companies which sponsor the Indian national workers were called by the Makkah Governorate and told their employees were no longer required to submit themselves for immediate deportation.

12. (S/NF) CORROBORATION: Separately, a representative of Johnson's company reported that he appeared in person at the passport office of the Makkah Governorate and was told that "there are orders from our bosses not to deport these individuals." The passport office had received an order in writing from "internal affairs" (most likely the Ministry of Interior) to halt deportations of these specific individuals. Our contacts claim that this is the first time an order "in writing" has been delivered by central government superiors overruling the Makkah Governorate and hence their belief that the deportation issue had been "fully resolved."

13. (S) COMMENT: The rescinding of the deportation orders is the latest - and we hope, final - development in a long saga. It appears that Assistant Minister for National Security Affairs Prince Mohammed bin Naif acted to halt the deportations after Embassy Riyadh's intervention (reftels). While Embassy has not seen a copy of the orders, we assess that our contacts' assertions are credible and that the case of these Christians has been resolved. The timing of these events leads us to suspect that the individuals involved were collateral victims of an attempt by religious conservatives in Makkah to embarrass the King's Interfaith Dialogue Initiative. The case also revealed latent tension between the Makkah Governorate and central Ministry of Interior authorities. Unsurprisingly, the central government in Riyadh prevailed, but the effort required is evidence that the King's initiative does not yet enjoy unqualified support throughout the Kingdom. END COMMENT

RUNDELL